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ABSTRACT

When tracing the status of females in education over the last 200 years, it can be seen that while schools reflected the sexism of the larger society, they differentiated by gender far less than institutions such as the family, the labor market, and government. Although women's access to educational institutions varied by their race and class, middle and upper class women were able to take advantage of the structural integration of educational and employment institutions to gain access to formerly male preserves. Recent literature on the sexism of the schools tends to focus on portrayals of gender in readers such as the absence of females and role differentiation, the channeling of children into stereotypical occupations, and male bias in college admissions and financial awards. However, a case can be made for the relative androgyny of the schools. As the use of educational credentials became influential in hiring decisions, women were able to lay legitimate claim to more occupations. Women's access to schools, combined with the growth of credentialism, enlarged employment options available to women. Finally, since women's access to education varies by race and class, the growing importance of education for jobs may be linked to a reduced importance for gender and a heightened importance for race and class in structuring employment opportunities. (LH)

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EDUCATION WAS FOR WOMEN WHAT THE FRONTIER WAS FOR MEN

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I. Introduction.

If Horace Greeley had been concerned with young women's social mobility he might well have advised them to go to school. For while schools reflected the sexism of the larger society, they differentiated by gender far less than institutions such as the family, the labor market or government. As the schools and the labor market became more closely intertwined in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the relative equality women enjoyed in the schools legitimated their claims for equality in jobs. This suggests that the proximate cause of women's entry into positions of authority in the teaching profession, and into library, clerical and telephone and telegraph occupations around the turn of the century was their access to school training for these occupations and these occupations' reliance on formal educational credentials in the hiring process.

Women's access to educational institutions varied markedly by their race and class. It was overwhelmingly white middle and upper class women who were able to take advantage of the structural integration of educational and employment institutions to gain access to formerly male preserves. The source of differences in the occupational distribution of black and white women through the first two thirds of the twentieth century, it appears, can be traced to differences in their educational opportunities.

Finally, while some of the highest paid, prestigious and, until recently, most stubbornly male occupations like medicine, the law and engineering also rely on formal educational institutions to provide much of the training, practioners in these professions have been able

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to control the educational programs relevant to their jobs and/or retain a substantial amount of on-the-job learning requirements. These innovations appear to have been critical ingredients in their practioners' success. This suggests that the root of differences between such occupations and those which also require high levels of education but which are poorly paid and which have more limited scope for the exercise of authority-- the so-called semi-professions--is the locus of and control over training. It suggests an alternate way of understanding the "failure" of teachers, librarians and social workers to professionalize.

II. Recent Literature on the Sexism of the Schools.

Recent historical, sociological and psychological studies have provided ample and detailed documentation of sexist practices within the schools. Early readers were found to have a noticable absence of females and "striking differentiation of roles by sex." (1) The sex bias in language and validity of standardized texts has been demonstrated. (2) Curricular requirements have been shown to channel children into sex stereotypical occupations. (3) The male bias in college admissions procedures and awards of financial aid has been documented. (4) And those women who gain admittance to higher education despite all the obstacles are known to face a "chillier" classroom climate. (5)

These findings have led many writers to see education as just one more institution which reproduces gender differences in the larger society. Blanche Fitzpatrick, for example, argues, the "...restriction of educational opportunity, and thus of career

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opportunity, leads directly to the economic disadvantage of women through working life,..." and calls for an end to Women's Inferior Education. (6) Florence Howe and Carol Ahlum conclude:

> "The accomplishments of nineteenth century feminists with regard to education for women were profound. Yet these institutional changes were accomplished without striking at the heart of beliefs abut the nature of women's inferiority and her second 'place' or 'role' in the social and political order. Educational institutions accommodated themselves to the presence of women, either alone or in the company of men, without changing their fundamental views of the comparative educability of women and men. We know now that education per se does not change the status of women with regard to men, but merely the status of women with regard to other women." (7)

Different conclusions seem warrented, however, when the sexism of the schools is viewed in comparative institutional perspective.

III. The Relative Androgeny of the Schools.

For the first two hundred years of its existence, higher education in America was staunchly patriarchal. Girls were taught academic subjects in their homes and later in dame schools, but until 1837 no girl, no matter what her academic qualifications or social status could formally participate in higher education. (8) By contrast, women with appropriate social status and circumstances were

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involved in industry, the professions, politics and religion during this period. (9)

Over the course of the nineteenth century gender lines in most institutions became more rigid. In the family the separate spheres ideology reduced the overlap in women's and men's areas of responsibility. In the labor market women's share of employment in many professions and in business declined from levels achieved before industrialization. (10) Some of this decline was due to the shift in the locus of work out of the home. (11) The development of male professions, unions and informal male work groups excluded women from opportunities to develop skills in the workplace (12) The corporation's eclipse of family business eliminated an avenue of upward mobility previously availiable to well-to-do widows. While women's share of the labor force grew from 9.6% to 17.0% between 1840 and 1890 fully 50% of these workers were employed in domestic and personal service occupations. (13)

At the same time as gender differences were beirg emphasized in the labor market and in the family, gender differences were becoming decidedly more blurred in the schools. From being completely barred from higher education until 1837, women accounted for 36% of all students enrolled in higher education by 1890, having gained access to 73% (as opposed to 80% for men) of all colleges and universities. (14) This access extended up to the most prestigious irstitutiobns. While not all prestige institutions admitted women, some, like Columbia, Chicago, Yale and Wisconsin admitted and conferred degrees upon significant numbers of women in their graduate programs. In 1900 70% of women earning the Ph.D. degree received it from a top ranked

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research university. Only 62% of men could make a similiar claim. (15)

Exactly why this transformation occurred is not yuet fully understood although the outlines of the process seem clear. Prior to the nineteenth century both girls and boys were taught to read so they might understand the Bible. The relatively egalitarian treatment of girls and boys in this regard stemmed from the individualism of the protestant religions. Writing was not necessary for religious pruposes and apparently was taught to far fewer girls than boys. Lockridge found a significant difference in the signiture literacy of men and women in colonial New England. (15)

On the demand side, the equalization of women's and men's educational attainment was spurred by the very development which enhanced gender distinctiveness in other institutions--the development of the home as a separate feminine sphere. The isolation of family life enhanced the social importance of the parenting and educational activities that women performed there. As Julie Matthaei argued, this legitimated female self-seeking, for,

> "To perform the important social vocation of homemaking correctly, a woman had to develop her own skills and social knowledge." (14)

This legitimation of women's education, together with the challenge to traditional ideas set in motion by the spread of the market, led many women to want to attend, establish and operate schools. (15) On the supply side, many male colleges which were short of funds opened their doors to the one previously excluded group with a demonstrable ability

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to pay--white women. (16)

IV. Schooling and Jobs.

During the nineteenth century the "development of character and the pursuit of culture" were the principle results of education, even higher education, for most women. (17) Some women clearly had aspirations to work outside the home, even in careers, and Sarah Gordon found that 48 or 13.2% of the 363 graduates in the first ten classes at Smith pursued full-time professional careers sometime in their lives. (18) Nonetheless most college trained women would probably have agreed with Mary Van Kleeck when she wrote in 1911,

> "...very few graduates of women's colleges who go out, diploma in hand, to hunt positions can doubt that our problem today is not how to gain admittance to a college but how to make effective use of ourselves after Commencement Day." (19)

But reorganizations within the labor market were to change this. The growth of science permitted abstract descriptions of processes which previously could be understood only after many years on the job. Book learning became a superior substitute to learning on the shop floor and the power to be had from firm-specific experience was lost to workers. (20) The development of large scale business enterprise with its huge workforce, interconnected production processes (often combined with the use of skill-saving technology) permitted the reorganization of the work process. Employers sought new ways of managing their work forces, abandoning personal relations which had served in simpler times and developing management "systems." Employers

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required trustworthy team players. Employees were willing to accommodate themselves if given the promise of regular pay increases with seniority and insulation from labor market competition. (21)

Some of these changes did and others did not lead to the use of educational credentials in the hiring process. Educational credentials were influential in the hiring decision where job-specific skills could be learned in schools and where schooling served as a screen for affective characteristics valued by employers. Although nineteenth century schools are often characterized as having been irrelevant to the world of work, Rodgers and Tyack point out that schools transmitted job-related skills and attitudes for <u>some</u> occupations from the earliest times.

> "For students from the right sorts of background and bound for the right occupations, the prevocationalized schools were eminently practical places. One of the oldest and straightest of career lines, that toward college, seminary, and the ministry, ran directly through the secondary school, as did the paths to most other professions. So did the much broader and shorter path from the normal class of an urban high school to a position as schoolmistress. In many late-nineteenth-century cities the largest single contingent of secondary school students was made up of young women enrolled in normal classes, working to master the specific curriculum of their district in a way that would vault them directly

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into elementary school teaching.

> The relationship between the schools and business careers was never so clear-cut; but youths who gambled on clerkships as the entry point could gain a good deal of specific vocational training from the schools, at least in such skills as penmanship and ciphering. By the end of the century and in still greater numbers, young, urban, native-born women could capitalize on the same instruction to work their way through the schools into the expanding secretarial and commercial positions opened to women." (24)

As the use of educational credentials became more wide-spread they legitimated women's claims to more occupations. Literature on the feminization of teaching shows why this was the case. Before the identification of expertise with formal schooling, when the goals and measures of achievement of educational enterprises were diffuse and hard to assess, Strober and Tyack found "...society was reassured by having leaders whose social characteristics were of high repute." (25) They found that "...superintendents were almost all male, middle-aged, white, Protestant and experienced in education." (26) Tyack and Hansot found that in the nineteenth century, "Even the most ambitious and effective female leaders needed men to front for their activities and to persuade males to grant the resources of money and power they required to pursue their work." (27)

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Bureaucratization of urban school systems in the last third of the nineteenth century led these schools to substitute objective measures of achievement, such as college degrees, for subjective methods of evaluation. By the turn of the century women could claim 62% of the elementary school and 6% of the senior high school principalships as well as some positions as assistant superintendent, director and even a few of the district superintnedencies. (28) Female teachers were organizing campaigns for equal pay and publically challenging the male educational leadership on matters of curriculum and direction. (29)

V. Conclusions.

While women's education has been shown to generate non-traditional values, there has been little systematic work linking women's education to non-traditional work options. (30) This thesis, that women's access to schools combined with the growth of credentialism enlarged the employment options availiable to women, is an attempt to specify a structural transformation which may be linked to the breakdown of the reproduction of women's subordination economy-wide. I think it's provocative in suggesting a systematic role for the State, as provider of education, in shaping gender differences in employment opportunities. Also, since women's access to education varies by race and class, the growing importance of education for jobs may be linked to a reduced importance for gender and a heightened importance for race and class in structuring employment opportunities.

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END NOTES

(1) Terry N. Saario, Carol Jacklin and Carol Tittle, "Sex Role Stereotyping in the Public Schools," Harvard Educational Review Vol. 43 No. 3 (August 1973), p. 390.

(2) Ibid., pp. 399-405.

(3) Ibid., pp. 405-410.

(4) Blanche Fitzpatrick, Women's Inferior Education. (New York: Praeger, 1976).

(5) Project on the Status and Education of Women, "The Classroom Climate: A Chilly One for Women?" (Washington: Association of American Colleges, n.d.).

(6) Fitzpatrick, op.cit., p. 13.

(7) Florence Howe and Carol Ahlum, "Women's Studies and Social Change," in Alice S. Rossi and Ann Calderwood, eds., Academic Women on the Move. (New York: Russell Sage, 1973), p. 395.

(8)

(9) Alice Kessler-Harris, Out to Work. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), Ch. 1.

(10) Kessler-Harris, op.cit., Ch. 2.

(11) When trades were performed in the home, women learned many trade-related skills through helping out in rush periods. The movement of trades out of the home removed this opportunity. The only

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job-related skills which could be learned in the home prepared women for traditional tasks of child care and household maintenance.

(12) For an analysis of why profit-maximizing employers had no incentive to oppose skilled male workers' exclusion of women from their ranks see Michael J. Carter, "Competition and Segmentation in Internal Labor Markets," Journal of Economic Issues Vol. XVI No. 4 (December 1982); 1063-1077.

(13) W. Elliot Brownlee and Mary M. Brownlee Women in the American Economy. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 3; and Elyce J. Rotella From Home to Office. (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1981), p. 29.

(14) Mabel Newcomer, A Century of Higher Education for Women. (New York: Harper Brothers, 1959), pp. 46,37.

(15) Susan Carter, "Academic Women Revisited," Journal of Social History, Vol. 14, No. 4, p. 684.

(16) Kenneth A. Lockridge, Literacy in Colonial New England. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), pp. 17-19.

(17) Julie A. Matthaei, An Economic History of Women in America (New York: Schocken, 1982), p. 113.

(18) Susan Carter,"Access to Skills verses Access to Jobs," in Towards Equitable Education for Women and Men: Models from Past Decades. (Saratoga: Skidmore College, 1984).

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(19) Joyce Antler, "Culture, Service, and Work: Changing Ideals of Higher Education for Women," in Pamela J. Perun, ed., The Undergraduate Woman: Issues in Educational Equity. (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1982), p. 20.

(20) Sarah H. Gordon, "Smith College Students: The First Ten Classes, 1879-1888," History of Education Quarterly Summer 1976, p. 164.

(21) Mary Van Kleeck, "What Alumnae are Doing: Some Facts and Some Theories about Women's Work," The Smith Alumnae Quarterly January, 1911, p. 75.

(22) Michael Carter, op. cit..

(23) Sanford Jacoby, "

(24) Daniel T. Rodgers and David B. Tyack, "Work, Youth and Schooling: Mapping Critical Research Areas," in Harvey Kantor and David B. Tyack, eds., Work, Youth and Schooling. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982), p.274.

(25) David B. Tyack and Myra H. Strober, "Jobs and Gender: A History of the Structuring of Educational Employment by Sex," in Patricia A. Schmuck, ed., Educational Policy and Management. (New York: Academic Press, 1981), p. 143.

(26) Ibid..

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(27) David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, Managers of Virtue (New York: Basic Books, 1982), p. 63.

(28) Ibid., p. 183.

(29) Robert E. Doherty, "Tempest on the Hudson: The Struggle for 'Equal Pay for Equal Work' in the New York City Public Schools, 1907-1911," History of Education Quarterly 19 (4) (Winter 1979), 419-434 and Wayne Urban, "Organized Teachers and Educational Reform during the Progressive Era: 1890-1920," History of Education Quarterly 16 (1) (Spr. 1976), 35-52.

(30) On the connection between education and feminist values see Anne Firor Scott, "The Ever Widening Circle: The Diffusion of Feminist Values from the Troy Female Seminary, 1822-1872," History of Education Quarterly 19 (1) (Spr., 1979), 3-26.

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